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## Chapter 9

# Whose voices and what values? *State grants for significant public content in the Russian media model*

Olga Dovbysh & Tatiana Belyuga

### Abstract

This study explores how the public service function of media can be implemented in a media model where the institution of public service broadcasting has not been established thus far. Analysing the Russian media model, we investigate how paternalistic state support is related to the commercial logic of mass media. Taking the example of state grants for significant public content, we reveal what topics and whose voices are gaining visibility in mass media. The analysis of state grants revealed the limitations of public accountability in grant competition, the overlap of public interest with state interest in grant projects, and a lack of problematisation in supported projects. Two main groups of topics were identified – public-oriented “by default” topics (culture, history, etc.) are related to an official governmental agenda, while problem-based and controversial topics are less visible. Journalists applying for grants try to anticipate what topics will be considered public-oriented topics by the grant competition’s expert council. Therefore, the only voices that matter are those that do not contradict the official political agenda.

**Keywords:** state grants, Russian media model, public service content, state control, market failure

## Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, public service broadcasting (PSB) was introduced in the majority of post-communist states. Only some post-Soviet countries (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) failed to transform state broadcasting into PSB (Jakubowicz, 2012).

Some scholars note that the introduction of PSB in post-Soviet countries was an artificial process performed at the “insistence” of and under “additional pressure” from the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Representative on Freedom of the Media (Richter & Golovanov, 2006). Public broadcasting in such countries is criticised

for being strongly dependent on political elites and a direct extension of the political power structure (Jakubowicz, 2012).

Another case is Russia and other countries where the institution of PSB was not introduced at all. How can enhanced civic engagement and informed citizenship be achieved in such media models? What is the nature and degree of state intervention in the way mass media provides a public service? In this chapter, we explore the mechanisms of state support for public-oriented content production and distribution in the current Russian media model. We address not only the practical embodiment of public service, but also a more general idea of public interest. Public interest implies a responsibility to support the norms, ethics, and values of a society through informational diversity and represent the opinions and perspectives of various social groups and communities, including those that are small and underprivileged (McQuail, 2010; Rozanova, 2007). In this sense, we understand public service as the ability to create a “communicational condition of democracy characterized by [the] informed and responsible engagement of citizens in public debates under conditions of separation and [the] balance of power” (Rozanova, 2007: 142).

In the following study, we focus on one particular institutional form of this mechanism – state grants for providing “significant public information”. We find these grants to be an important aspect of the Russian media model and especially for regional mass media to provide informational diversity and the opportunity for different voices within society to be heard. Following Couldry (2010), we understand a voice as the instrument by which one expresses an opinion, which can in turn have two interrelated meanings: voice as the process of speaking or voting in elections, and voice as an expression of value, or the act of valuing and choosing to value. Therefore, voice can be seen as an instrument for organising human life and resources through the process of valuing particular social groups or topics. Therefore, when considering state grants for mass media, we investigate two research questions:

1. How does the mechanism of state grants shape the process of addressing public interest?
2. Whose voices gain visibility in the mass media as a result of such grants, and what values do they construct?

This text is organised as follows. In the next section, we discuss the contemporary Russian media model and the role of public interest in it. Next, we analyse previous attempts to establish PSB in post-Soviet Russia. These two issues lead us to an analysis of the political economy of media in Russia and ways media fulfil the public service function given the lack of an institutionalised public service model. In the empirical part, we describe the research methodology and present the results. The chapter concludes by discussing state grants as a mechanism to support public-oriented content production and distribution.

## Russian media model: The role of the state and public interest

De Smaele (1999) was one of the first scholars to notice the limits of applying a Western media model to Russia. She witnessed the emergence of an “indigenous” Russian media model.<sup>1</sup> Later, Oates (2007) concluded that Russian media operated according to a “neo-Soviet model”. Becker (2014: 192) criticised this approach and argued that the Russian media landscape, particularly with respect to government control, “has more in common with other authoritarian countries than it does with the immediate Soviet past”. He suggests that this model can be better described as “neo-authoritarian”.

The current Russian media model operates based on a duality of new and old institutions (Kiriya, 2018). New neoliberal norms were mainly implemented after the collapse of the Soviet Union and involve, for instance, commercial advertising in media, news journalism, and private ownership in media. Old norms suggest peculiar relations with political power, the prohibition against privately owning certain types of media (first of all – television), the use of media to forcefully advance government policy, and fragmentation of the public sphere. Referencing the same dualistic image, Vartanova (2012) calls the Russian media model “statist commercialized”, with two simultaneous processes shaping the model: marketisation and state influence.

The media industry in Russia is growing quite rapidly compared to other countries. In 2018, Russia ranked fifth (together with Indonesia and Pakistan) in the rating of the fastest-growing entertainment and media industries (Price-waterhouseCoopers, 2018). The Russian advertising market is also growing fast, approximately 16 per cent annually (RMAA Agency, 2018). At least four main features of the current Russian media market can be mentioned (Vartanova et al., 2016). First, it is important to note the economic, audience, and information domination of national television.<sup>2</sup> Russian television, regardless of the ownership structure, is financed primarily by advertising and sponsorship. Second, the prevalence of an advertising-based business model is noteworthy. Third, the media market is largely concentrated in leading segments of the media industry, combined with the fact that the state controls much of the media capital. The largest media companies belong to government-controlled structures (All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company [VGTRK], Gazprom-Media) or to private companies with their main interests outside media sectors. Finally, the media market is dominated by central (federal) media companies economically and in terms of control of audience numbers and information. Regional media holdings are much smaller in terms of revenues and audiences.

State interference in the media market includes the role of the state and state agencies in shaping media structures and policy. The role of the state in Russian media has been widely discussed by previous scholars from different

perspectives, such as direct interference in media ownership (Gehlbach & Sonin, 2014), market regulation (Kiriya, 2017) and media manipulation in electoral campaigns (Akharkhodjaeva, 2017; Enikolopov et.al, 2011), to name a few.

In general, state intervention is one of four central dimensions or pillars of normative media models, together with media markets, political parallelism, and journalistic professionalism. The particular constellation of these four dimensions then constitutes the three models and is the basis by which individual countries are classified (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). State interference can be high in democratic corporatist countries because of the central role of PSB, which is usually subjected to a higher degree of regulation than commercial media systems falling under the liberal model (Vltmer, 2011). However, as Vltmer stresses, there is a substantial difference between state interference as the extensive regulation of PSB and interference in the running of media organisations and their editorial decision-making processes. When focusing on the Russian media model, Vartanova (2012) points out a strong interrelationship between the media, journalists, and the state, legitimised by shared beliefs – whether consciously or unconsciously – in the regulatory and decisive role of the state (or state agencies). With respect to the connection between public broadcasting and the political system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), Russia is closer to the government model, where implementation of the public service is moderated by the government or by the political majority.

Vartanova (2012: 130) points out that the “philosophy and values of PSB had never been legally or even publicly declared in Russia”. In the post-Soviet period, political and business elites have been the main driving forces in media policy, whereas the public has mostly been shunted aside (Koltsova, 2006). The limited degree of participation by people in the public sphere can be seen as one of the elements that are largely indigenous to the Russian media model (Kiriya, 2018). In the next section, we elaborate on these peculiarities by applying them to the establishment of PSB in post-Soviet Russia and the reasons it has failed.

### Failed attempts:

#### Why PSB did not emerge in post-Soviet Russia

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were two national television networks in Russia that potentially could have been reorganised as PSB channels – Channel 1 and Channel 2.

#### *Attempt One: ORT – Russian Public Television*

Channel 1, formerly known as Gosteleradio (State television and radio of USSR), had a broadcasting signal that reached almost every household in the country.

After the collapse, transmission and production facilities were still financially supported, but not as lavishly as in the Soviet years (Hoffman, 2002). Channel 1 tried to earn revenue from advertising, but it was unsuccessful due to a lack of commercial experience and a high level of theft. In 1994, Channel 1 was taken over by Boris Berezovsky, a well-known political entrepreneur who was close to then-President Boris Yeltsin and his family.

In order to explain this process, two important things must be clarified about this transitional period. First, mass media outlets of that period (in fact, in the next periods as well) should be understood as political resources rather than as business or public service actors (Soldner, 2008), as a “weapon to gain political capital” (Koltsova, 2001: 322). In fact, politicised media-holding companies played the role of “surrogate parties” during the Yeltsin presidency (Zasoursky, 2016). In this context, addressing public opinion was of minor importance, while media campaigns mainly addressed “political decision makers and/or to rivals in the economic or political sphere” (Soldner, 2008: 162). Second, during the Yeltsin presidency, political decisions were often made behind closed doors through informal bargaining between those who were close to the president and his family (Soldner, 2008).

As such, Berezovsky lobbied for the creation of a “president’s channel”, which would be Yeltsin’s instrument in the political struggle. In November 1994, Yeltsin signed a decree making it possible to privatise the huge television channel without an auction, as required by law (Hoffman, 2002). The name of the new organisation was Russian Public Television (ORT). Hoffman (2002: 281) continues that “the idea of ‘public’ television, which would not be state television, was a novelty, and no one knew precisely what it would become”. In fact, the word “public” meant nothing, since the company was owned by state enterprises (51% of shares) and by various private companies (49% of shares). From the very beginning, Berezovsky started to manage the channel as a commercial one.

### *Attempt Two:*

#### *RTR – Russian Television and Radio Broadcasting Company*

Another national television network, Channel 2, continued to be owned by the state during the period of Perestroika. A new Federal State Unitary Enterprise, The Russian Television and Radio Broadcasting Company (RTR), was founded in 1990 and served as the main media outlet supporting Yeltsin in his struggle with then-Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. In early 1993, RTR acquired the status of a national broadcasting company, according to the VGTRK official webpage.<sup>3</sup> In 1998, all regional branches of the former Gosteleradio were merged into a holding company, thereby making RTR the largest state-owned media corporation in Russia. Since the company also inherited broadcasting facilities

that allowed it to reach almost 98 per cent of all Russians, media moguls always saw it as an extremely attractive actor in the advertising market, making it the focus of lobbying from the advertising industry. Thus, RTR began to operate in hybrid form – a state-owned company with subsidies from the federal budget and, at the same time, a commercial player in the advertising market.

Though public broadcasters in European countries often receive funding from advertising, significant limitations are placed on the amount of advertising in broadcasting in order to diminish dependence on ratings, but stimulate the production of the content, which is valuable for society (Kiriya, 2018). In the case of RTR, though, no regulations were put into place regarding advertising. Therefore, state and quasi-state media companies declared their devotion to state and public interests, but in fact acted primarily according to the logic of the market, making money on advertising while still enjoying budgetary financing, various tax and other reductions, and long-term state loans (Aksatarova et al., 2003). Kiriya and Degtereva (2010) point out the paradox of Russian state television channels receiving the largest part of their income from advertising. This is still true: in 2017, *Perviy Kanal* (the current brand name of ORT) and *VGTRK* (the current brand name of RTR) posted the highest revenues among national television broadcasters (Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media, 2018).

### *Attempt Three: OTR – Public Television of Russia*

Almost 20 years later, in 2013, another attempt was made to introduce PSB in Russia through the launching of the television channel Public Television of Russia (OTR). It was an initiative of then-President Dmitry Medvedev, who founded it as non-commercial organisation. OTR's official web page claims that its mission is the “formation and development of contemporary civil society [translated]”.<sup>4</sup> According to OTR's charter, the television channel's activities aim to “distribute and promote ideas of civil society that includes by informing Russian audience about events in Russian and abroad through television broadcasting [translated]” (OTR, 2015: 3). The company is fully subsidised by the state. Advertising activities are restricted (except for social advertising and social sponsorship).

The Council of Public Television assigns people to the television channel's supervisory board. The general director and members of the council are assigned directly by the president of Russia.

Initially, OTR was available on all cable networks, by satellite, or Internet protocol (IP) television, while the terrestrial broadcasting of OTR was available in digital standard format only. Therefore, in 2017, OTR's audience share was only 0.6 per cent (for the audience “all 4+”) (Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media, 2018). Later, OTR was included in the first multiplex set of

television channels, available to households after the country's shift to digital broadcasting. After the shift in the majority of Russian regions in January 2019, the share of OTR will grow (RIA Novosti, 2019).

On the one hand, OTR is an artificial case of a television channel being established *de jure* as a public one, while *de facto* it does not meet at least two important requirements of public media (Brants & Siune, 1992). First, it lacks public accountability since the members of the council and the general director are assigned by the president. Second, it lacks service universality in a territorial sense because of the low coverage of OTR. On the other hand, OTR is probably the only television channel with nationwide coverage, representing and giving voice to people from different regions (the programme *Bolshaya strana* [*Big country*]) and from small settlements, the programme *Malye goroda Rossii* [*Small towns of Russia*]) in particular.

When comparing these three cases, the failure to establish PSB in Russia can be explained with several different reasons. The examples of Channel 1 and Channel 2 demonstrate the lack of political will to establish PSB together with non-mature economic and social institutions during the transitional period. The Case of OTR is rooted in a lack of PSB elements and is closer to cases of PSB in eastern European countries (Jakubowicz, 2012). As such, in the next part we discuss what mechanisms are used to ensure the production and distribution of public service content within the Russian media model.

### The political economy of media in Russia: “Market failure” and state paternalism

Following previous research, we distinguish two interrelated aspects of the Russian media model that influence how public service functions can be implemented: the “failure” of the media market and the paternalistic role of the state.

How does the concept of market failure relate to public service information? McChesney (2012) claims that controlling media markets with private capital makes them concentrated and noncompetitive and leads to a marginalisation of the voices and interests of the poor and working class. It means that if a media outlet exists within a commercial paradigm (i.e., it relies on market financing sources), then it seeks to maximise its audience rather than appeal to the public (Berg et al., 2014). Consequently, the media outlet preferably focuses on such content that allows it to attract a larger audience. Often, it is referred to as “sensationalism” of the media or the “sex, sport, scandal” formula. As a result, socially significant – but less attractive – content aimed at a mass audience becomes irrelevant for such a media outlet and will not be published or broadcast.

This “market failure” effect has the most visible impact at the regional level of a country's media system. Beginning in the 2000s, regional media outlets



have been forced to act as commercial actors, which also has an influence on their editorial policy and news process (Dovbysh, 2019; Richter, 2006). At the same time, regional media professionals still claim to be performing a service for the public. Within limited professional freedom and clientelistic relations with local authorities, this job also becomes, for many journalists, a way for professional legitimisation (Erzikova & Lowrey, 2014).

The “failure” of the Russian media market co-exists with another important element of contemporary media culture – the paternalistic role of the state in relations between citizens and power elites and between people and their leader. Russians have “viewed it [the state] as a sacral force, a guarantor of the unity and the very existence of the Russian nature and society” (Vartanova, 2012: 131).

Beginning in 2000, when Vladimir Putin became president, another element was added to the description of state-media relations – the formation of so-called common values and construction of a “national idea” (Becker, 2004; Kolstø, 2004). Soon after his appointment as president, Putin emphasised the need for a new state ideology, one based on “pan-human values” and “traditional Russian values”. State paternalism was deemed one such value. Kolstø (2004: 3) notices that the claim for a new ideology came after “nearly a decade of conscious deideologization of the Russian state”.

In other words, this is a kind of authoritarian model, where ruling elites not only exercise control but also feel responsibility towards society. Following this logic, state authorities implement paternalistic policies aimed at “curing” the “market failure” of media outlets not providing much socially significant content. There are three main mechanisms to bridge this gap in the contemporary Russian media model:

1. Direct subsidies from the state are usually aimed at national or regional state-owned media outlets. In 2018, the state spent RUB 83 billion (0.5% of all budget expenses, or 0.1% of Russian GRP) on mass media (Gazeta.ru, 2018). The main recipients of these subsidies are the largest media companies: VGTRK (RUB 24.6 billion); TV-Novosti, the autonomous non-commercial organisation that produces content for Russia Today’s television channel (RUB 19.2 billion); Russia Today (RUB 6.8 billion); OTR (RUB 1.5 billion); Zvezda, the television channel owned by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (RUB 2 billion); and print media (RUB 3.5 billion) (Gazeta.ru, 2018). The mechanism of direct subsidies does not include any transparent procedure of public control regarding how these media outlets spend the budgetary funds (Kiriya, 2018). Also, there is no clear and publicly discussed editorial policy for these media outlets. As such, Russian state-owned media companies are usually considered instruments for articulating the official discourse (Tolz & Teper, 2018).

2. State information contracts is another institutional form of state support, popular in Russian regions. Using such contracts, regional authorities “order” the coverage of specific topics in regional mass media (Ademukova et. al., 2017). Previous analysis of such contracts demonstrated that many of them were designed to produce “socially significant content” (Dovbysh & Gudova, 2016). However, topics are assigned on a top-down basis, and in many contracts, the nature of such content is only stated vaguely. For instance, one of the most popular topics in such contracts is media coverage of the governor’s activities. Media content under this topic may vary from investigating the governor’s activities to enhancing authorities’ accountability to pure political public relations. However, when taking into account the client-executor relations underpinning these contracts, they become a convenient tool for manipulation and lead to clientelistic relations between regional authorities and the mass media (Erzikova & Lowrey, 2010).
3. State grants for “significant public projects” from the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications (FAPMC) were established by decree by the Ministry of the Russian Federation for Press, Television and Radio Broadcasting and Mass Communications<sup>5</sup> in March 2000. According to Decree No. 44 (2000), financing can be granted for the production or distribution and replication of concrete television and radio programmes, contributing to the solution of public significant tasks.

Later, a description of significant public content was added to the decree. According to the latest version (Decree No. 6, 2018: 8), significant public projects are understood to be different types of television and radio programmes, “representing public and state interests and corresponding with main directions of state informational policy and long-term priorities of state and public development [translated]”. Some of these directions are specified:

- patriotic education
- promoting a healthy lifestyle, physical culture and sports, spiritual, moral and cultural values of the peoples of the Russian Federation, traditions of family education, motherhood and large families, education and new educational possibilities
- the formation of a tolerant mind and prevention of extremism
- the formation of a tolerant attitude toward labor migrants and the social adaptation of migrants
- development of inter-ethnic communication
- promoting the best achievements in science, education and culture
- informational support of socially unprotected groups of citizens
- an increase in legal and financial literacy

- promoting charity and patronage
- ecological education
- projects for kids

[translated] (Decree No. 6, 2018: 8)

Surprisingly, Internet projects are briefly described as projects having “social or educational value”.

According to the Decree (2018), a project should meet certain requirements in order to receive a grant, such as 1) addressing the “public significance” of the project; 2) providing a descriptive scenario of how the project will be conducted; 3) accurately accounting for the project budget; and 4) explaining how it corresponds to the needs of the target audience, that is, the media outlet’s audience and others.

All the projects are assessed by an expert council. The members of the council are assigned by the head of FAPMC. In 2018, the council included nine members: the head of FAPMC (council chair) and three other representatives from FAPMC; a representative from the Ministry for Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media; a representative from the Federal Service for Supervision in the Field of Communications, Information Technologies and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor); a representative from the Federal State Unitary Enterprise, Russian Television and Radio Broadcasting Network (RTRS); a representative from the Russian Child Foundation; and a representative from St. Petersburg State University. The assessment procedure is organised in the form of voting. The project receives support if the majority of the members of the expert council vote for it.

In comparison to state information contracts, state grants suggest a clear pattern of how money is spent. If state informational contracts work in a top-down manner – as authorities specify what topics should be covered – the grant system works in a bottom-up fashion, meaning that media outlets, not authorities, propose socially and publicly significant topics they want to cover. Moreover, the mechanism of a grant contest is centralised: all media outlets from all regions compete for grants with each other. Therefore, we consider state grants as the most transparent institutional form of state support of public service content production and distribution within the Russian media model today. In the next sections, we thus analyse the projects and topics supported via state grants in the years 2001–2015.

## Methodology

The initial database included 2,875 media projects for television, radio, and Internet supported by FAPMC from 2001 to 2015. The data are freely available

on FAPMC's website. The projects included television programmes, movies and series, radio programmes and performances, websites, and other forms of media. The data were collected in a single table, which contained the names of the projects, the companies applying for them, and brief descriptions of the projects.

The coder for this research was developed via the open-coding method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in order to conceptualise and label the data (Moghaddam, 2006). Categories for coding were defined by the researcher based on their observations. Thereby, data analysis involves the researcher as an actor in the process (Walker & Myrick, 2006). For this research, the procedure included two parts: pre-coding and a basic coding stage. First, we selected 100 project descriptions (50 from the top of the data list and 50 from the end). The descriptions were then assigned thematic categories by two encoders working independently. Then, they defined the thematic categories, discussed them, and collected them together in a coding protocol. Second, the rest of the project descriptions were encoded using the categories identified in the first stage. Some of the categories were removed, and additional categories were proposed. Ultimately, 20 categories were identified based on the empirical data: economy; Russian regions; security; healthcare; education; science; underprivileged groups of people; culture; religion; foreign policy and diplomacy; domestic policy; patriotism; history; migration; travel and tourism; mass media; ecology; Internet; sport; other.

The majority of them included three to five subcategories providing additional information derived from the project descriptions. For instance, the category of culture included four subcategories: art (music, fine art, ballet, etc.); literature; multiculturalism, traditions, folk art; and Russian language. In order to provide more detailed coding, each grant project could have several categories and subcategories. For instance, a radio programme called People of Russia also covered the topic of ethnical variety of Russian population and discussed the history of folklore, cultural exchange, and the preservation of traditions and music pieces of various ethnic groups; hence, it was coded using the categories Russian regions (subcategory: national autonomies and ethnicities) and culture (subcategory: multiculturalism, traditions, folk art).

## Results

This section presents and interprets analysis results of the aforementioned dataset. First, descriptive statistics of the whole dataset are presented. They are followed by analysis of topical subcategories.

*Number of projects*

The number of project applications grew steadily between the years 2001 and 2015, with a slight decrease in 2006–2009 (see Table 1). In the beginning of the 2000s, the FAPMC supported approximately 100–150 grants projects. The number increased to nearly twice that amount by the mid-2010s. The majority of projects receiving support are for television, while the numbers of projects for studying the Internet and radio are almost the same. Even though the number of grants focusing on the Internet increased, it is still lower than for radio.

**Table 1.** Number of grant projects for different types of media

Year	Internet	Radio	TV	Total
2001	14	21	68	103
2002	3	13	38	54
2003	23	28	111	162
2004	21	21	52	94
2005	49	26	114	189
2006	19	16	42	77
2007	24	31	63	118
2008	44	38	93	175
2009	49	28	72	149
2010	48	63	157	268
2011	54	65	141	260
2012	42	65	161	268
2013	43	56	133	232
2014	44	56	91	191
2015	49	57	140	246

*Grant topics*

Table 2 demonstrates what grant topics have been most popular during the 15-year observation period.

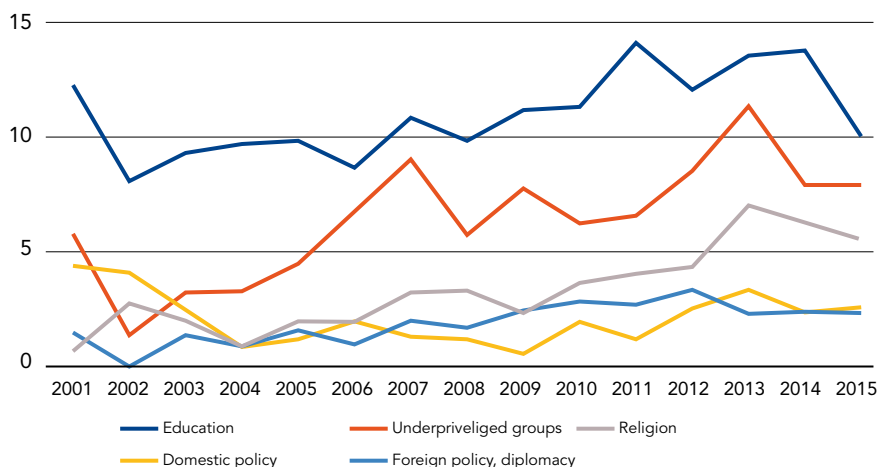
The most popular categories were culture, history, and education, while the least popular were economy and ecology (see Table 2). The average share of projects for each category was quite stable and did not change significantly during the 15-year observation period, with the exception of five categories (see Figure 1). One topical category – religion – demonstrated the highest growth, improving from 0.7 per cent in 2001 to 5.6 per cent of all funded projects in 2015. In total numbers, it means a growth from one project in 2001 and two

projects in 2002, to 16 projects in 2014 and 19 projects in 2015. The greatest number of projects on religion received support in 2013 – 21 projects.

**Table 2.** Distribution of grant projects (per cent)

Category	Share, 2001–2015
Culture	23.8
History	15.0
Education	11.0
Patriotism	6.6
Regions	6.5
Underprivileged groups	6.4
Science	3.8
Healthcare	3.5
Religion	3.3
Mass media	3.1
Others	3.1
Domestic policy	2.1
Foreign policy, diplomacy	1.9
Internet	1.9
Migration	1.6
Sport	1.5
Travel and tourism	1.5
Security	1.4
Economy	1.0
Ecology	1.0
Total	100.0

One category – healthcare – demonstrated significant decline. After funding six projects in 2001 and five projects in 2002, the FAPMC then funded fifteen projects in 2011, followed by a decline to only seven projects in 2015.

**Figure 1.** Topical categories demonstrating the highest growth during 2001–2015 (per cent)

### *Topical subcategories*

Analysis of the categories gives only a cursory and generalised representation of what topics were supported by the state. Therefore, an examination of the subcategories provides more nuance.

For instance, we divided the regions category into four subcategories: national autonomies and ethnicities; life in Russian regions; Chechen Republic; and Republic of Crimea. Interestingly, the FAPMC supported projects on the Chechen Republic in 2001–2007, a time of military conflict in the republic. Likewise, the FAPMC funded more projects on the Republic of Crimea in 2014–2015, simultaneously with the emerging political crisis in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 (see Table 3). Projects receiving support covered the history and culture of Crimea and represented the peninsula as a part of Russia, emphasising its important military role in Russia's past and present. For instance, the description given for one of the projects, a television documentary movie called *Pozor Shestogo flota* [*Shame of the Sixth Fleet*] by Miriam Media production studio, states:

This TV documentary talks about one heroic episode of domestic military history when in 1988, Soviet sailors from a small patrol ship entered into confrontation with a heavy American cruiser off the coast of Sevastopol and forced it to leave the Black Sea area [translated]. (Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media, 2014: n.p.)

**Table 3.** Number of projects in the subcategories of Regions

Year	Chechen Republic	Republic of Crimea	National autonomies and ethnicities	Life in Russian regions
2001	1		2	5
2002	2		1	4
2003	2		9	5
2004	1	1	4	3
2005	4	1	9	7
2006			4	3
2007	1		5	4
2008			14	7
2009			9	5
2010			17	9
2011			15	8
2012		1	9	7
2013			12	5
2014		3	10	3
2015		7	6	5
Total	11	13	126	80

We divided the security category into four subcategories: terrorism, fighting against it, international terrorism (11 projects); legal violations (15 projects); traffic regulations (15 projects); and emergencies (7 projects).

We also divided the healthcare category into four subcategories: drug addiction (56 projects); alcohol consumption and smoking (8 projects); healthy lifestyle (49 projects); and medical help for the population (16 projects). The first project applications about the danger of alcohol consumption and smoking appeared in 2009.

We divided the education category into six subcategories. Three of the subcategories dealt directly with types of education: pre-school and school education (31 projects); higher education (20 projects); and education aimed at gifted children (33 projects). The other three subcategories dealt with educational content: for children (pre-school and elementary school students) (179 projects); for teenagers (middle- and high-school students) (197 projects); and legal and financial literacy of citizens (34 projects). Projects on how best to provide educational content for adults appear only after 2010. It is clear that the most popular topics have been those focusing on providing different kinds of educational programmes for children and teenagers. Such topics as reforming the educational system, educating kids with special needs, and other challenging

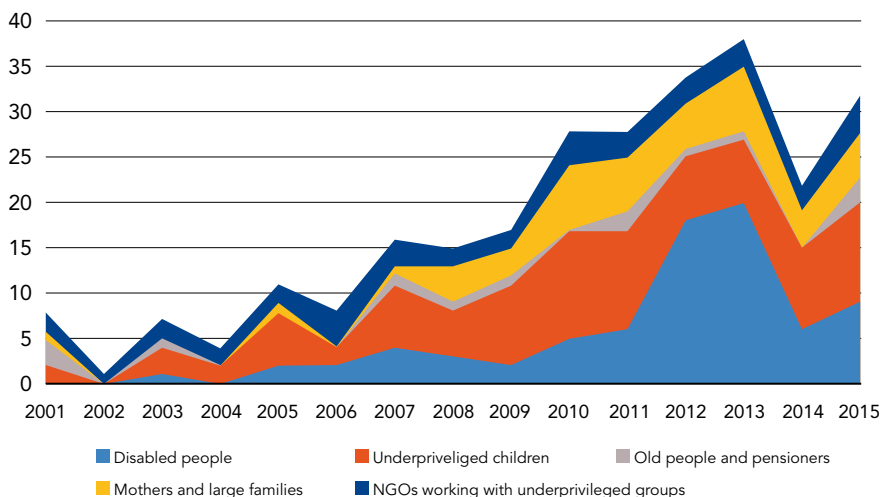


topics are barely represented. For instance, we found only one project related to special needs: a television programme *Uchimsya vmeste* [*Study together*], “devoted to inclusive education for people with disabilities [translated]” in 2013. This project was proposed by non-commercial organisation for disabled people Inva TV (Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media, 2013).

We divided the science category into three subcategories: problems in the reforming and financing of science; history of science, international scientific achievements; and achievements of Russian and Soviet science. However, the majority of projects belonged to the second (63 projects) and third (98 in total) subcategories. Only nine projects dealt with reforms and other problems of science – this is less than one project per year.

We divided the underprivileged groups of people category into five subcategories: disabled people; underprivileged children (disabled, orphans, etc.); old people; mothers and large families; and NGOs working with underprivileged groups. Figure 2 demonstrates how often each subcategory was represented during the sample years. The most popular subcategories were disabled people and underprivileged children. Topics on motherhood and large families only appear among grant project applications beginning in 2007.

**Figure 2.** Number of projects in topical subcategory, Underprivileged groups of people



We divided the culture category into four subcategories: art (including projects related to different types of art, like music, ballet, cinema, fine arts, etc.); literature; multiculturalism in Russia (projects on multiculturalism, traditions, folk art of ethnicities living in Russia); and Russian language. The first two subcategories have proved three times more popular than the others.

The religion category includes four subcategories: interfaith relations and religious studies (15 projects); Orthodoxy, Russian Orthodox Church (116

projects); Islam (1 project); and other faiths (5 projects). The number of project applications dealing with Orthodoxy or the Russian Orthodox Church dominate, and the number of such projects has increased dramatically since 2010.

The foreign policy category includes three subcategories: international organizations, memberships and cooperation (46 projects); cooperation between states, diplomacy (28 projects); and contemporary world events related to foreign policy (20 projects).

We divided the internal policy category into five subcategories – one for each branch of power: executive branch; judicial branch; and legislative branch – and two for the most salient topics in this category: corruption; and army and armed forces.

Surprisingly, the most popular subcategory in this group proved to be the last one, with most projects covering topics related to the Russian armed forces (44 projects). Also, we noticed changes in the nature of the projects over time. At the beginning of the 2000s, the projects mainly focused on daily life and the problems with recruits, discussing army life, its weekdays and holidays, and everyday military work. In the 2010s, the projects became more oriented toward the army as an institution and covered activities of the Russian army and fleet, often with a “patriotic” stance. Only one radio programme *Voennoe revu* [*Military revue*] from this period, by media outlet Komsomolskaya Pravda and supported in 2013 and 2014, was problem based and covered army reform via a “frank conversation with military personnel and retirees about the army and its problems [translated]” (Federal Agency for Press and Mass Media, 2013).

The patriotism category includes three subcategories: contemporary Russian heroes and well-known persons (103 projects); attractions (modern or historical) (88 projects); and heroes – ordinary Russian people (37 projects). We chose to call this category “patriotism” because the projects aim at nurturing a sense of patriotism and praising Russia’s places and people.

We divided the history category into five subcategories: Russian history and events (212 projects in total); world history, events (44 projects); historical Russian heroes, famous personalities, masterminds (236 projects); foreign heroes, famous personalities (6 projects); and wars (147 projects). The two subcategories dealing with Russian history and heroes received the most project applications, while grant projects on various wars took third place. The majority of projects in this subcategory dealt with the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) and World War II (1939–1945). Projects on other wars only appear in the data during anniversary years, for instance the 100-year anniversary of World War I in 2013 (9 projects) or the 200-year anniversary of the 1812 Patriotic War with Napoleon of France (4 projects). Only a couple of projects focused on recent military conflicts, like the Afghan conflict (1979–1989), or other wars. Several projects focused on wars and military conflicts in Crimean history, supported in 2015, a year after the peninsula’s annexation.

We divided the migration category into three subcategories: immigration (24 projects); migration within CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) and the Baltic countries (40 projects); and history of immigration (10 projects). We defined only two subcategories within the travel and tourism category: internal tourism (in Russia); and external tourism (abroad). This category has been one of the least popular, and the projects in the subcategories are distributed almost equally. For the five remaining categories (mass media, ecology, Internet, sport, others), we did not include any specific subcategories.

In the next section, we critically analyse state grants as a tool for the production and distribution of public service content within the Russian media model.

## Discussion

The contemporary Russian media model is characterised by a tendency towards commercialisation. With the exception of the national state-owned media, which get direct funding from state budgets regardless of ownership structure, media outlets in the country tend to receive financing from advertising or sponsorship. It concerns also regional and local state-owned media, usually experiencing lack of budgetary funds. Such circumstances direct the behaviour of media outlets towards producing less complex, but more attractive, content for a mass audience. This behaviour creates a “market failure”, one related to an underrepresentation of public service content in mass media. Another important feature of the Russian media model is the paternalistic role of the state. This duality has the most significant influence on regional media. The intersection of these two elements creates a situation wherein the state implements a paternalistic policy to support the production and distribution of public service content (i.e., to improve “market failure”).

We argue that state grants are the most transparent form of state support within the Russian media model. First, media companies, regardless of their ownership structure, can obtain such grants.<sup>6</sup> Second, there is clear and publicly available information about what content is produced via the grants. The procedure of grant competition is also more transparent than in the case of direct subsidies or state informational contracts. Third, the grants provide support for local and regional media, which are in a more difficult financial situation than national media outlets. Finally, the database for grant funding lists a number of bright and interesting media projects focusing on different aspects of life and different places within the country. However, a detailed investigation of the state grant system revealed several limitations.

The first limitation concerns the procedure of grant competition. At the moment, only two members of the expert council represent various groups of society: the representative from the Child Foundation and the representative

from St. Petersburg State University. All other members are officials from organisations affiliated with the executive branch of power or from other state-owned organisations. Therefore, the disproportional representation by state actors sitting on the council highlights the restrictions on public accountability and affects the selection process.

The second limitation has to do with the unclear and vague definition of what constitutes significant public content used in official documentation (the Decree and additional documents). It states that projects should represent “public and state interests”, while state interests in fact often replace public interests. Since the Decree predefines certain topics that are a priority for long-term public and state development, these topics predominate among the projects receiving support. On the one hand, the expert council assesses the projects according to this framework. Yet, on the other hand, media outlets themselves suggest topics that are “safe” and have more of a chance of being supported. Such self-censorship is especially relevant for regional media outlets, for which these grants are a significant – if not a crucial – source of financing.

As an illustration of this two-sided framing of issues, let us look more closely at the category of underprivileged groups of people. Five subcategories define which underprivileged groups should be represented in media. For instance, all the projects in the subcategory, motherhood and large families, represent two groups – traditional families with two or more kids, and families with adopted kids. Only one project (out of 44 in this subcategory) focused on another underprivileged group – pregnant women or women with kids living in difficult conditions. Since a focus on motherhood and large families is mentioned as a priority of long-term state development, media outlets replicate this predefined topic for their projects. As a result, other significant public issues related to motherhood and families, such as rates of employment among mothers or teenager mothers, are not represented at all.

Another case of the two-sided framing of issues concerns the attempts by journalists to react to the current political agenda and even anticipate it. For instance, projects about the Chechen Republic were visible only at the time of military conflict there; however, there are still many other issues of social interest and problems in the republic that deserve attention.

A lack of problematisation is the third limitation of the grant system. Topic analysis demonstrates that the majority of the projects represent different kinds of success stories about Russia (gifted kids, scientific achievements, contemporary heroes, artistic achievements, etc.), rather than investigate various significant public problems. In fact, the majority of grant projects represent either topics that are problematic “by default” (like drug addiction, alcohol consumption, or terrorism) or topics that are assigned as problematic by the state, for instance, migration issues or the adoption of kids. Projects focusing on problem-based, controversial, or uneasy topics are much less represented.

## Conclusions

This chapter investigates how public-oriented content can be produced and distributed within a hybrid media model, and it takes the grants system as a case study to analyse and evaluate this process. With respect to the example of a Russian statist-commercialised media model, we explore how public service function occurs in a media model that never made any allowances for PSB institutions. The state implements a paternalistic policy to support the production and distribution of public-oriented media content through direct subsidies, state informational contracts, and state grants. However, to what extent do these projects give a voice to the voiceless in public media discourses on different groups of people?

Our analysis of state grants as the most transparent form of state support revealed the limitations of public accountability in the competition process, an overlap of public interest with state interest in the grant projects and a lack of problematising those projects receiving support. The grant system, initially aimed at expanding the variety of topics covered in the media and improving “market failure” regarding the underrepresentation of significant public content, in many cases works as a mechanism for promoting a state agenda.

This chapter moves beyond the context of PSB institutions that easily fit into Western (European) media models and discusses instead how public-oriented topics can be addressed outside PSB or in media systems in non-democratic regimes. The current crisis affecting PSB in many European countries requires a reconsideration of the values underpinning PSB as well as a reassembling of the mechanisms of public-oriented content production and distribution. Further discussion of how and through what externalities public interest and public value can be achieved by mass media in non-democratic and authoritarian regimes will contribute to an exploration of the additional risks, as well as opportunities, for universal public service beyond institutionalised PSB media organisations.

## Notes

1. The authors who we cite in this chapter use the notions of media system and media model synonymously. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), a media system (of a country) can be characterised by a certain model. We will use model in this text as a specific type of a (Russian media) “system”.
2. Television channels with nationwide coverage. Beginning in January 2019, analogue broadcasting was replaced by digital broadcasting; therefore, 20 television channels are now available to the majority of the country’s population free of charge.
3. <http://vgtrk.com/#page/221>
4. <https://otr-online.ru/o-telekanale/>
5. The former name of the Ministry for Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation (<https://minsvyaz.ru/en/>)
6. As of 2016, state-owned media outlets are no longer allowed to apply for state grants.

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